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A
S E R M O N

PREACHED BEFORE

THE UNIVERSITY

AT ST. MARY'S

On WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 1799;

Being the Day appointed

BY HIS MAJESTY'S ROYAL PROCLAMATION

To be observed as a Day of

SOLEMN FASTING AND HUMILIATION.

BY

CHARLES SAWKINS, M.A.

STUDENT OF CHRIST CHURCH,

AND ONE OF HIS MAJESTY'S PREACHERS AT WHITEHALL.

OXFORD:

SOLD BY HANWELL AND PARKER;

BY F. AND C. RIVINGTONS, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH YARD, AND BY

J. HATCHARD, PICCADILLY, LONDON.

1799.

IMPRIMATUR,



MICH. MARLOW,
VICE-CAN. OXON.

Mar. 28, 1799.

TO THE REVEREND

CYRIL JACKSON, D. D. F. R. S.

DEAN OF CHRIST CHURCH IN OXFORD

THIS DISCOURSE

IS,

WITH A JUST SENSE OF THE VALUE

OF THAT APPROBATION

WITH WHICH HE HATH HONOURED IT,

MOST RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED.



HABAKKUK III. 17, 18.

ALTHOUGH THE FIG-TREE SHALL NOT BLOSSOM, NEITHER SHALL FRUIT BE IN THE VINES; THE LABOUR OF THE OLIVE SHALL FAIL, AND THE FIELDS SHALL YIELD NO MEAT; THE FLOCK SHALL BE CUT OFF FROM THE FOLD, AND THERE SHALL BE NO HERD IN THE STALLS: YET I WILL REJOICE IN THE LORD, I WILL JOY IN THE GOD OF MY SALVATION.

THE declaration made by Habakkuk in the text of his constancy and faith cannot in reason be confined to any one case of public distress. By whatever means it might seem good to the Almighty to chastise his people, in every case alike we must suppose the Prophet to declare his own unshaken steadfastness, and the unalterable purpose of his mind, *to rejoice in the Lord, and to joy in the God of his salvation.*

If he, who lived under the Mosaic dispensation, who was of the number of those, *that desired to see*
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the day of Christ, but saw it not^a, expressed such confidence in the consolations of faith, it would ill become us, who enjoy the full light of the Gospel, to doubt but that these consolations may yield at least equal support to ourselves.

From the words of the text, therefore, this general and important truth may be collected—that, in a time of public calamity, a believer hath a support peculiar to himself; such as is sufficient to enable him to bear his sufferings, not only with fortitude, but even with joy.

The considerations, by which this important truth may be enforced, well deserve the attention of the younger part especially of those who hear me. Neither will they, I am persuaded, be heard unwillingly by those, who may have pursued them much farther in their own meditations.

The objects, then, of a Christian's faith are necessarily the chief objects of his hope. The only disadvantage, as we all know, under which the things eternal labour in our estimation, when compared with the things which are temporal, is, that the things eternal are not seen. When, therefore, faith hath removed this disadvantage, there can be no competition in our regard between things of infinite disproportion in their value.

^a Luke x. 24.

We assert not in the mean time an insensibility, which every man's experience would contradict, to worldly blessings. The Prophet himself, in the words of the text, allows the severity of the trial, to which the removal of them would expose him, by the very form in which he makes profession of his faith. There belongs to every gift of God its value, to the least and most transient, as well as to the most exalted and most lasting. In proportion to this value it is reasonable for us, whilst we possess it, to rejoice in it, and to regret its loss, when it is taken from us. God is honoured not by our fullen neglect^b of any of his gifts, but by our sober

^b Πᾶν κτίσμα Θεῷ καλόν, καὶ ἔστιν ἀπόβλητον, μετὰ εὐχαριστίας λαμβανόμενον. 1 Tim. iv. 4.

Quamquam hæ res externæ non sunt justitiæ æternæ, tamen lucent in eis bonitas et sapientia Dei, et vult Deus nos in earum usu exercere et offendere obedientiam. Melancthonis Op. edit. 1601. vol. iv. p. 410. in loc. Apostoli, quem modo citavimus.

God's greater light doth not extinguish the less. If God had not thought them blessings, he had not bestowed them : and how are they blessings, if they delight us not ?

Bishop Hall's Epistles, 2nd Decad. 8th Epistle.

Having the authority of St. Paul's example in more than one similar instance (Acts xvii. 28. 1 Cor. xv. 33. Tit. i. 12.), I shall, I trust, give no just occasion of offence to any one by citing after the above the words of the greatest of the heathen poets :

Οὗτοι ἀπόβλητ' ἐστὶ θεῶν ἐρικυδέα δῶρα.

IA. I'. 65.

On this last quotation I cannot forbear to observe, that, in the expression of the same sentiment, the same word is used by the Apostle himself and by Homer.

and

and religious use^c of all of them. It is even our duty to become as exactly acquainted as we can with their value, that no gift, which we receive from his hands, may remain without its just acknowledgment.

Neither do we forget that the measure of faith varies in almost infinite degrees in different persons. Still, according to the measure of our faith, whatever it may be, the disproportion must be felt between the things temporal and eternal: and in whatever degree our faith is increased, in the same degree our chief hope must be more firmly fixed beyond the present life.

Now it is in the very constitution of our nature, that, whatever is the chief object of our hope, every thing else interests us but faintly in comparison with it. Success as to other things gives us comparatively little gratification; and disappointment as to

^c As to one particular instance, Bullinger hath well expressed himself:

Convivæ Domini fumus, Dominus pascit nos, in hujus oculis versamur, illius munificentia alimur. Precandum ergo et gratias agendas esse ante et post cibum nemo est qui non videat, sed et ita in mensa ut in oculis Dei versandum. Proponatur quod honestum dictu et auditu sit jucundum. Reverentia hospitis, qui præsens est, et nos alit, perpetuo retineat in officio et disciplina sancta.

Bullingeri Commentar. in omnes Pauli Apostoli epistolas, edit. 1582. p. 446. in 1 Tim. iv. 4, 5.

other

other things gives us comparatively little pain. Upon this, therefore, whatever it may be that is the chief object of our hope, our tranquillity at all times principally depends: neither can any thing, to which this hath no relation, either overwhelm us utterly with sorrow, or give us permanent disquiet, however painful or distressing in itself it may be.

This, I say, holds good from the very constitution of our nature, whether we are altogether worldly, or whether we are truly religious—whether our chief hope is confined to this life, or whether it is placed beyond it. It is obvious, therefore, that a true believer is, as such, secured from any overbearing sorrow, as long as there is nothing which may shake the grounds of his belief.

Yet farther—it is a poor and unworthy notion of religion, (which however hath at all times been a very common one, and which perhaps, more than any other thing, keeps the young and inconsiderate at a distance from it) it is a poor and unworthy notion of religion, that it hath nothing in it which can interest the heart and the affections—that it is incapable of yielding us any present pleasure, however great may be the happiness, to which it may hereafter lead us. If this could be true of any other system of religion, (which still could scarcely be admitted as to the serious and upright,

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however

however mistaken, professors of the most corrupt) it is certainly most untrue of the Christian faith. The whole history of our Redemption, whether we look to the eternal purpose of the Father, to the voluntary humiliation of the Son, or to the continual agency of the Holy Spirit—whether we look to the nature of the miracles, by which the truth of the Christian revelation hath been confirmed to us, or to the constancy, even unto death, of those holy men, who have borne witness to it—whether we look to the partial but progressive renovation of our nature in the present life, or to the promise of our entire deliverance from *the bondage of corruption* in that which is to come—every way it is calculated to excite, in the highest possible degree, our gratitude and love; every way it is calculated to create an interest in us, which nothing that respects only this transitory state can produce.

From the lively apprehensions, therefore, which a Christian hath of the objects of Faith, and from the elevation which those apprehensions give to his affections, it follows, that his chief joy in actual possession, as well as the chief object of his hope, is placed beyond the reach of molestation from the calamities of this life.

But again—the force of every worldly evil, with which he meets, is greatly lessened to him by various circumstances. The miseries and confusions,
which

which take place in the present state, however they may exercise his patience, still add strength to his faith : for he is taught by the Revelation of God to expect them to take place. When therefore he compares the state of this world, as he finds it, with that which it is foretold in the Scriptures that it would be, he is confirmed in his belief of the Divine origin of that Religion, which is the foundation of his hopes and of his joys.

Yet again—whatever distress any public calamity may bring upon him, whatever diminution of his former comforts, whatever actual sufferings, he hath still a greater portion even of this world's happiness than it would be possible for an irreligious man, in the same circumstances, to enjoy. For he hath been accustomed to take an exact notice of all God's mercies to him. When, therefore, any are removed, not one is unknown to him of those which still remain. He hath been accustomed also to look on every blessing, whilst he enjoyed it, as a free gift, to which he had no claim: and he hath possessed it with a just sense of its precarious tenure. With respect to the blessings that remain, from his general habits of contentment he receives from every one of them the full measure of comfort, which it is possible for it to convey. He acknowledges the least gift with thankfulness and joy, as a pledge of the faithfulness and mercy of the Giver. He

considers that, if he now enjoys fewer advantages, there are fewer talents, for which he is responsible. Instead of sinking into melancholy indolence, he remembers that he hath still a place to sustain, and still hath duties to fulfil—that an account must be rendered of a few talents, as well as of many—and that, if only a few are left, he should be but the more anxious that they may not be neglected or misemployed. He repines not if the pressure of actual sufferings increases. However distressful may be the time in which he lives, it is, he remembers, the time appointed to him by a Being of infinite wisdom—he remembers the sinfulness of his nature, and that he hath no just pretension to be exempted from a share of worldly misery—he remembers still farther that, since in the national guilt the guilt of his own sins is included, he hath himself in part occasioned the distress, in which he is involved, and that therefore his sufferings, instead of provoking impatience, should excite his humility.

He hath also a refuge in the day of calamity, which the ungodly knoweth not—he knows that God is *a God of mercy, a God who beareth prayer*. Having had the frequent experience of God's long-suffering and loving-kindness towards himself, having been accustomed daily to trust in him, and daily to render thanks and praise unto him for personal benefits,

benefits, he comes with an humble hope that he shall not be cast out^d, when he offers up his prayers for his country. But whilst he approaches unto God with hope of his mercy, he approaches unto him also with remembrance of his holiness. He asks not for his people deliverance from God's judgments, should the sins which provoked them still continue; but he asks, first, that those judgments may be effectual in working a national repentance, and then that they may be removed.

He submits also, with entire resignation to the Almighty, the time and the means of the deliverance, which he implores. He remembers, that a blessing is pronounced on all those, *who wait for the salvation of the Lord*^e. No delay, therefore, wearies him, no succession of disappointments casts him down. He knows that in circumstances the most discouraging, and by means the most unlikely in human estimation, God is able *to deliver his servants*: and that we are then often nearest to deliverance, when we have the least hope left in ourselves.

If, after all, the deliverance for which he prays is not vouchsafed to his prayers, he reposes himself

^d Εὐχὴ Θεῷ συνάπτεται καὶ οἰκεῖται. Photii Epist. edit. Londin. 1651.

p. 23.

^e Isaiah xxx. 18. Lam. iii. 26.

still with full trust in the infinite perfections of the Almighty. He knows that he never can be so entirely in the power of any of God's creatures as they are in the hands of God. He knows that no evil can befall either himself, or others, but by the will of God; and that he, who hath appointed to him his sufferings, hath fixed their limit. But yet far above this, he knows that God's over-ruling Providence orders all events to the advancement of his one eternal purpose of wisdom and of mercy—that the more signal events, which affect the well-being of empires, and those that are more private, and affect only individuals, have all their tendency, nearer or more remote, to this end:—in a word, that they are parts of one great plan, the issue of which shall be to all true believers a state of everlasting happiness and glory. Every complaint is silenced, every feeling of discontent and of impatience is repressed by this conviction. He looks forward to the time, when he shall be freed from the infirmities, with which he is now encompassed, when his faculties shall be enlarged, and his knowledge perfected: when the ways and works of God, and all the dispensations of his providence, shall be laid open before him: and when the very sources of his present sorrows shall be the subject of never-ceasing praises and thanksgivings.

To apply the considerations, which have been suggested, to the immediate occasion of this day—
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We are here assembled before Almighty God, not merely as his creatures, to implore his protection, nor merely as sinful creatures, to implore his pardon, but as having an interest in his favour through the mediation of his Son, and as looking forward through the efficacy of that mediation to the inheritance of his everlasting kingdom. We come therefore with full assurance that the prayers, which we offer up to him in faith, shall in any case be blessed to us in the event. But we presume not to prescribe to his unerring wisdom the particular answer, which our prayers shall receive from him. If our sins, and the sins of our forefathers, require from his justice that the extremity of worldly evils should fall upon us—if the return of peace and safety would leave us unhumbled for our past offences, and increase our indifference to his eternal truth—in a word, if his most holy decrees cannot be otherwise accomplished than by our exemplary abasement, nor the advancement of his glory be by other means so effectually secured, we are prepared to say, *Righteous art thou, O Lord, and just are thy judgments*^f.

The history of his dealings with all other sinful nations would of itself be sufficient to forbid any murmuring on our part. If Nineveh and Babylon, which were once the glory of the East, have for

^f Psal. cxix. 137.

the sins of their inhabitants so long remained a desolation—if Tyre, which was once the emporium of the world, is now only (as it was foretold by Ezekiel ^g) *a place for the spreading of nets*—if the mightiest monarchies of ancient times have been made successively to vanish away, we certainly could not with reason complain, if he, who alone hath raised us to this eminence of worldly greatness, should, for our forgetfulness and ingratitude, in a moment humble us to the dust. If the seven churches, which were in Asia, which were watered by the teaching of the blessed Apostles, because they attended not to Christ's warning voice, have long since either wholly ceased to be, or existed only in a state the most wretched and degraded; and if God's chosen people, *the natural branches of that olive-tree, into which, contrary to nature, we of the Gentiles were engrafted*^h, have been, though not rejected finally, yet during so many ages unacknowledged by him, we could not complain, if, for the boldness with which we have insulted his majesty and holiness, and for the lukewarmness and ind devotion with which we have waited on his service, he should take from us the advantages, which have aggravated our guilt, *and should remove our candlestick out of his place*ⁱ.

We are prepared, therefore, even in the case of

^g Ezek. xxvi. 5. 14.

^h Rom. xi. 24.

ⁱ Rev. ii. 5.

our extreme humiliation to confess and to adore his righteousness. Even the love of our country shall not withhold us from acknowledging that he is just in taking vengeance on us for our sins. From the most awful expressions of his displeasure we will still gather comfort to ourselves. We will confess and adore, we will reverence and love that unceasing watchfulness, with which he observes his creatures; his jealousy of his honour, his hatred of uncleanness, and of all iniquity. We will rejoice in the relation which we still bear to a God so just and holy. We will rejoice that we were *created in his image*, and we will pray that the brightness of that resemblance to him, which sin hath sullied in us, may, by the influence of his Spirit, be restored in our souls.

But, even as to worldly circumstances, it is possible that we may experience, in the most distressful times, an especial measure of God's favour and protection. *Behold*, saith he to Baruch by the prophet Jeremiah, *I will bring evil upon all flesh; but thy life will I give unto thee for a prey in all places, whither thou goest**. Alleviations of sorrow and means of consolation are at all times without number in his hands. But if, on the contrary, for our own good, to prove our faith and patience, or for our brethren's good, to encourage the fearful and to confirm the wavering, he should withdraw from

* Jeremiah xlv. 5.

us every worldly comfort, and should exercise us above others with a variety of sufferings, we doubt not but that, knowing our weakness in ourselves, he will proportion the strength, which he imparts, to the trial which he bids us undergo. We know that his most faithful and most honoured servants, the Prophets and Apostles, have gone through sufferings to their everlasting rest: we know that his Eternal Son, when for our sake he was contented to put on him this mortal body, *drank of the same cup*: and, placing our reliance wholly on the succours of his grace, we refuse not to receive any severity of chastening from his hands, if we may be known by this mark to be his children ¹.

¹ Σταδίον ἐστὶν ὁ παρὼν βίος, ἐπάθλων δὲ ἡ ἐκείθεν πολιτεία. Photii Epist. p. 98.

Ἀρετὴ ὡς ἀληθὺς, καὶ ἀρετῆς τῆς πρώτης μάλιστα ἄνθος, τὸ μετὰ κινδύνων καὶ θλίψεων καὶ παρευδοκιμημένην ὑπὸ τῆς κακίας ἀσπάζεσθαι τὴν ἀρετήν. Ejusdem Epist. p. 113.

Νῦν καιρὸς, εἰ βέλῃ, ἡ τὰς ἐξ ἀνθρώπων ἀπειλὰς οὐ δεδιότα σερρὸν ὀφθαλμοῦ τῆς ἀληθείας ὑπέρμαχον, καὶ λαμπρὰς τυχεῖν τῆς ἐκείθεν εὐφρομίας καὶ ἀναρρήσεως ἢ προσκαίρω καὶ βέβητη ἡδονὴ καὶ δόξη προδότην τῆς αἰδίας καὶ εἶναι καὶ ὀνομάζεσθαι. Ejusdem Epist. p. 120.

Remember ye be the workmen of the Lord, and called into his vineyard, there to labour till evening tide, that ye may receive your penny. But he, that calleth us into his vineyard, hath not told us how fore or how fervently the sun shall trouble us in our labour: but hath bid us labour and commit the bitterness thereof unto him, who can and will so moderate all afflictions, that no man shall have more laid upon him, than in Christ he shall be able to bear. Bishop Hooper. Letters of the Martyrs, 1564. p. 120.

I have taught the truth with my tongue and with my pen heretofore,
and

We are assured, therefore, that the prayers, which we offer up in faith, shall in any event bring a blessing upon us. We are prepared in any event *to give glory to the God of our salvation*. We confess, with humility and thankfulness for ourselves and for our country, that *it is of his mercies that we are not already consumed*^m. We read, *When there went out fire from him, and destroyed Nadab and Abihu for*

and hereafter shortly will confirm the same, by God's grace, with my blood. Declaration of the same prelate in a letter, written a week before he suffered death. Book of Martyrs, 1641. vol. iii. p. 152.

On the day before his death, to Sir Anthony Kingston, who said to him, "Alas! consider that life is sweet, and death is bitter; therefore, seeing life may be had, desire to live:" he replied, "True it is that death is bitter, and life is sweet; but, alas! consider that the death to come is more bitter, and the life to come is more sweet. Therefore, for the desire and love I have to the one, and the terror and fear of the other, I do not so much regard this death, nor esteem this life, but have settled myself, through the strength of God's Holy Spirit, patiently to pass through the torments and extremities of the fire now prepared for me, rather than to deny the truth of his word; desiring you and others, in the mean time, to commend me to God's mercy in your prayers." Book of Martyrs, vol. iii. p. 153.

See the account of his death in the same volume, p. 154—156. particularly his prayer (when he came to the place at which he suffered), which, whatever exception may be taken by a fastidious reader to the expression in any part, is for its piety and strength altogether worthy of this holy and eminent man; and which ends with these words: "Strengthen me of thy goodness, that in the fire I break not the rules of patience; or else assuage the terror of the pains, as shall seem most to thy glory."

^m Lam. iii. 22.

*their presumption, This is it, Moses said unto Aaron their father, that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace*ⁿ. But the resignation of a true believer to the will of the Most High hath in it nothing of cold indifference to the happiness or the sufferings of his fellow-creatures. We are commanded *to rejoice with them that do rejoice, and to weep with them that weep*^o. We are commanded to cultivate and cherish all those feelings, which endear to us our friends, our families, our country. Only we are warned to bear continually in mind *the first and great commandment, to love with all our heart the Lord our God*^p. If Samuel gave assurance to his people *that he would not cease to pray for them*^q, though they had sinned against the Lord in casting off his government, and if he mourned afterwards for Saul, whom he knew that the Lord had rejected^r—if Jeremiah and Daniel, whilst they confessed God's justice in bringing desolation upon Zion, yet instantly besought him *to cause his face again to shine upon his sanctuary*^s—if Moses and St. Paul, in an ecstasy of charity and infinite feeling of communion, as Lord Bacon ad-

ⁿ Leviticus x. 1—3.

^o Rom. xii. 15.

^p Deut. vi. 5. Matth. xxii. 37, 38.

^q 1 Sam. xii. 23.

^r 1 Sam. xv. 26. 35.

^s Lam. i. 8. 18. iii. 22. 48—50. v. 1. 21. Dan. ix. 4—19.

mirably

mirably expresse it^t, wished themselves, for the salvation of their brethren, anathematized and rased out of the book of life"—if our blessed Lord himself wept over the blindness and impenitence of Jerusalem^x, we cannot doubt but that we may and ought most earnestly and fervently to implore the preservation of our country, if it may yet be granted to our prayers.

We entertain most willingly the hope, that our prayers for its preservation may yet be heard—that it may please the Supreme Disposer of events to deliver us, as a nation, from the evils which we feel, and to avert the evils which we fear. But this hope can be entertained, on any rational grounds, only in one case, if (that is) we truly repent. Every hope, which does not include the supposition of our repentance, sooner or later must prove fallacious. Our confusion and ruin may be hastened or

^t It may be truly affirmed, that there was never any philosophy, religion, or other discipline, which did so plainly and highly exalt the good which is communicative, and depress the good which is private and particular, as the holy faith: for we read that the elected saints of God have wished themselves anathematized and rased out of the book of life, in an ecstasy of charity, and infinite feeling of communion.

Lord Bacon of the proficience and advancement of Learning, Divine and Human, book the second. See his Works, London, 1765. vol. i. p. 93.

^u Exodus xxxii. 32. Rom. ix. 3.

^x Luke xix. 41, 42.

delayed ;

delayed : but, *except we repent*, it must certainly come.

I purposely abstain on this day, on which we are assembled to confess and to ask the forgiveness of our own sins, from dwelling upon the impiety and wickedness of our enemies. Neither should I have mentioned it at all, if an hope had not been derived from thence by some persons, the fallaciousness of which cannot be too strongly or too frequently exposed. It is this, that, because our guilt, whatever it may be, is as it is said far less than theirs, God will not suffer so wicked a nation to prevail over us. It is wise and right to cherish in ourselves, and to hold forth to others, every rational ground of hope ; but, admitting their wickedness as a people to exceed our wickedness in any possible degree, there is not in this one ray of consolation. They surely, who would derive the least hope from hence, can have been but little accustomed to deduce their opinions of what is righteous in the eyes of God from his own revelation of himself. For did not he make use of nations, that were idolatrous and full of wickedness, to chastise his chosen people ? Did not he make Israel to serve at one time Moab^y, at another Midian^z, and even Amalek^a, whom he had determined finally *to blot out from under heaven*^b ? And did not he, in another

^y Judges iii. 12—14.

^a Judges vi. 3.

^z Judges vi. 1.

^b Deut. xxv. 19.

age, deliver up his holy city into the hands of the King of Babylon^c? Yet he had determined, as he saith by his Prophet^d, that *when he should have performed his whole work upon mount Zion and upon Jerusalem by means of the Assyrian, he would punish his stout heart, and the glory of his high looks.*

The wickedness, therefore, of our enemies, affords no security of God's farther long-suffering towards us—nor would the certainty that God's most signal judgments should fall on them give any certainty that he would not first employ them as his instruments for executing his judgments upon us.

But, even if it were as certain as we could desire that the most splendid success would finally attend us, that we should see our enemies entirely crushed, and left without any power to disturb our peace, I still affirm that, *except we repent*, confusion and ruin must at length come upon us. One danger, it is true, would be removed, one implacable and restless enemy subdued; but, *except we repent*, our sins would not fail to raise up some other more restless, if possible, and more implacable. When the people of Judah humbled themselves before the Lord, he declared that *he would not pour out his wrath upon Jerusalem by the hand of Sishak^e*: but,

^c 2 Kings xxiv. 10—14. xxv. 1—10.

^d Isaiah x. 12.

^e 2 Chron xii. 6, 7.

when

when they continued to provoke him by their abominations, *he poured out the wrath, which he had deferred, by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar*^f.

But to return—whatever may be our comparative guilt, the very notion of deriving hope from that source is dangerous in the extreme. Even at the bar of man less crimes do not go unpunished, because more heinous offences are committed.

But our comparative guilt itself may be far greater than we suspect, if we consider the means of religious improvement, and the temporal blessings which we have enjoyed. *You only have I known of all the families of the earth, saith the Lord by the prophet Amos unto Israel: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities*^g. The blessing of the Christian faith hath not indeed been enjoyed by us exclusively, but it hath scarcely been enjoyed by any other nation in the same purity, and in an equal degree. During more than the space of two centuries the light of the Gospel hath shone in this country with a lustre unequalled since the first and purest ages of the Church. Every truth, which respects either the mysterious nature of the Godhead, as far as it is revealed to us in the Scriptures, or the means of man's restoration from his fallen state, hath been clearly taught, and strenuously as-

^f 2 Chron. xxxiv. 25. xxxvi. 13—17.

^g Amos iii. 2.

ferted.

ferted. The most fervent zeal and the brightest talents have been employed in providing every help, by which the serious and humble believer might be advanced in piety and knowledge. We have had in the mean time a translation of the Scriptures, to the general accuracy of which the ablest judges have repeatedly borne testimony, and from which certainly no error in doctrine, no corruption in manners, can pretend to derive the least countenance. And with respect to temporal advantages, we have had the benefit of the best constituted government, and of laws the most impartially administered. The Lord hath delivered us often when we were in danger, and hath reestablished us in tranquillity when we had been in confusion. He hath made us famous among the kingdoms of the earth by the number and the greatness of our victories. He hath blessed us in the fruits of our own land, and he hath brought to us the products of far distant countries. To add no more; in the midst of war, whatever inconvenience or distress, in other respects, we may have felt from it, still we have only heard of the ravages which other nations have experienced, and we have increased in riches as a people, whilst they have been impoverished. *What could have been done more to my vineyard, the Lord may with reason say unto us, that I have not done in it^b?*

^b Isaiah v. 4.

There is then no point of view in which, if we consider the supposed smallness of our comparative guilt, the hope that is derived from it will not be found to be fallacious. Let us not attempt to conceal from ourselves our true state, nor the true cause of our distresses and alarms.

Our gratitude to God hath borne no just proportion to the greatness of the blessings which we have received from him, nor hath the improvement, which we have made, been in any just degree answerable to the means of grace, which he hath afforded us.

I forget not that the measure of our national piety cannot be exactly ascertained by human cognizance; and I most willingly cherish the hope, that it is greater than our fears may sometimes suggest. But there hath taken place among us one very unfavourable change, which no considerate person can have failed to observe, and which no friend to the welfare of his country can fail to lament. Of this change I the rather select the mention, as there are evidences, from which it is easy for any one to make the comparison.

Our Ecclesiastical writers inform us, that the Scriptures, when the translation of them into our language was first permitted to be read in this kingdom, were read by persons in all situations of life
with

with a seriousness and a diligence, that were suitable to their importance. There remains to this day one evidence of this so complete, as to render every other unnecessary. In the letters which were written (during the persecution, that followed soon after) by those who had taught, and those who had embraced, the truth, there is shewn such a familiar acquaintance with the Scriptures, that we must suppose the writers to have imprinted on their memory the very words of a considerable part of the sacred books, which indeed, with respect to one eminent martyr, a prelate not less considerable for his learning and judgment than for his piety, we know from his own testimony to have been done by himselfⁱ.

When the miseries of that time were ended, and the Church was reestablished in peace and in

ⁱ Farewel Pembroke Hall, of late mine own college, my cure and my charge. In thy orchard (the walls, butts, and trees, if they could speak, would bear me witness) I learned without book almost all Paul's Epistles, yea and I ween all the Canonical Epistles, save only the Apocalypse. Of which study although in time a great part did depart from me, yet the sweet smell thereof, I trust, I shall carry with me into Heaven: for the profit thereof I think I have felt in all my life time ever after, and I ween of late (whether they abide there now or no I cannot tell) there was, that did the like. The Lord grant that this zeal and love toward that part of God's word, which is a key and a true commentary to all Holy Scripture, may ever abide in that college, so long as the world shall endure.

Bishop Ridley. Letters of the Martyrs, before quoted, p. 92.

honour by Queen Elizabeth, still the Scriptures held, for a long time, in the estimation of all those who devoted themselves to any serious study, that place, which in every Christian country it might be expected at all times they would hold. In the last century it is well known that they were most reverently and diligently studied by the two greatest lights of the Law^k, amidst the various engagements of their laborious profession. In the same century, we know that contemplations were written on the whole book of Psalms by Lord Clarendon. But these whom I have mentioned, and perhaps even most others, whom it would be possible to add, must yield to one, whom I have had in this discourse occasion to cite, and than whom there hath not arisen in the Christian world a greater in the strength or in the splendour of mental endowments, Lord Bacon. I refer not only to his prayers^l, which are extant, or to the incomparable con-

^k Sir Edward Coke and Sir Matthew Hale.

^l As the entire works of Lord Bacon are not in the hands of every one, I subjoin the two following of his prayers.

The Student's Prayer.

To God the Father, God the Word, God the Spirit, we pour forth most humble and hearty supplications ; that He, remembering the calamities of mankind, and the pilgrimage of this our life, in which we wear out days few and evil, would please to open to us new refreshments out of the fountains of his goodness, for the alleviating of our miseries. This also we humbly and earnestly beg, that human things may not prejudice such as are Divine ; neither that from the unlocking of the gates of sense, and the kindling of a greater natural light, any thing of
incre-

feſſion of his faith, nor only to that ſmall but maſterly part of his advancement of learning, in which he treats profeſſedly of theology, but to the abſolute command, which that work throughout diſplays, of every alluſion by which it could be illuſtrated, and every light of every kind, that could be reflected on it from the moſt perfect knowledge of the word of God.

incredulity, or intellectual night, may ariſe in our minds towards Divine myſteries. But rather, that by our mind thoroughly cleaned and purged from fancy and vanities, and yet ſubject and perfectly given up to the Divine oracles, there may be given unto faith the things that are faith's. Amen.

The Writer's Prayer.

Thou, O Father, who gaveſt the viſible light as the firſt-born of thy creatures, and didſt pour into man the intellectual light as the top and conſummation of thy workmanſhip, be pleaſed to protect and govern this work, which, coming from thy goodneſs, returneth to thy glory. Thou, after thou haſt reviewed the works which thine hands had made, beheldeſt that every thing was very good, and thou didſt reſt with complacency in them. But man, reflecting on the works which he had made, ſaw that all was vanity and vexation of ſpirit, and could by no means acquieſce in them. Wherefore, if we labour in thy works with the ſweat of our brows, thou wilt make us partakers of thy viſion and thy ſabbath. We humbly beg that this mind may be ſtedfaſtly in us; and that thou by our hands, and alſo by the hands of others, on whom thou ſhalt beſtow the ſame ſpirit, wilt pleaſe to convey a largeſs of new alms to thy family of mankind. Theſe things we commend to thy everlaſting love by our Jeſus, thy Chriſt, God with us. Amen.

Lord Bacon's Works, London, 1740. vol. iv. p. 488.

In the edition of 1765. they are given, but leſs correſtly, vol. iii. p. 128.

I appeal

I appeal to the impartial judgment of every one, who is competent to judge, whether this general reverent regard to the Scriptures, and diligence in the study of them, hath not been greatly diminished among us; and whether, if it hath, such a change can have taken place without having produced correspondent effects upon our faith and our manners.

Whatever, therefore, may be our distress or our alarms, it is indifference to the word and to the will of God, that alone we have reason to dread. Hence, and hence only, is our danger. The greatest enemy which every man hath to his welfare, as a member of society, as well as to his peace as an individual, is within his own bosom: it is *the plague of his own heart*. Every inordinate desire, every vicious habit, every unrighteous and every uncharitable practice, as it increases the measure of national guilt, tends to bring on national ruin. The evils of sin cannot be calculated: the extent of the misery, which it produces, cannot be defined. Its influence reaches from individuals to families, and from families to kingdoms: its effects are felt in time and through eternity. God in his mercy hath set before us in every variety of form its banefulness, that we may flee from its deceits. If we obstinately cherish it, he will not tarry with us: and when he departeth from us, we can have no safety in ourselves. Every contrivance of human policy,
and

and every effort of human power, must then prove ineffectual to preserve us. The mercies which we slight will only increase our condemnation, and will bring down accumulated vengeance on our heads.

But whilst we wish to awaken, we wish not to oppress with terror. Excessive fears might prove as fatal to us as groundless and presumptuous hopes. No human means can preserve us, *unless we are at peace with God*: no human means can work our destruction, *if he is our strength and our shield. Look at the generations of old, and see: did ever any trust in the Lord, and was confounded? or did any abide in his fear, and was forsaken^m?* Infinite means are at all times in his hands to execute his purposes either of vengeance or of mercy.

But the way, in which he may preserve us, very probably may not be that, which we with our limited faculties may conjecture, or which we with the infirmity, that always adheres to our nature, may desire. Our final preservation by no means includes necessarily our speedy deliverance from distress or from alarm. His justice may require that we should be exercised with much severer trials than any which we have hitherto experienced. *Shall we receive good at the hands of God, and shall we not receive evilⁿ?* What claim have we, above all the

^m Eccclus. ii. 10.

ⁿ Job ii. 10.

other nations of the earth, to the enjoyment of his best gifts, without diminution and without interruption? He may see very grievous punishments to be necessary for our good, to teach us the value of his blessings, to subdue our impatience, to banish from our hearts every sinful affection, and to rekindle in them a just zeal for his honour.

Whatever may be the aggrandizement of our enemies, we shall at all times be in safety, if we put our whole trust in him. We must use our best judgment; we must employ all lawful means; we must faithfully and strenuously do our part: but, when we have done all, our reliance must be not on ourselves, but on him. We must trust in him, whilst the means of defence, and the advantages which we possess, shall be continued to us; and we must trust in him still, if they should be all taken from us. *Wo unto him that is fainthearted! for he believeth not, therefore shall he not be defended*°. It is well-pleasing unto God that our faith should gather strength, as our worldly hopes are withdrawn. Before the throne of his majesty no one ever humbled himself in vain. On the truth of his assurance and on the strength of his arm no one ever too firmly relied. When all apparent resources shall have been exhausted, when all visible means shall have been tried in vain, still he is all sufficient.

° Eccus. ii. 13.

If we cannot be delivered according to any human probabilities, still, if it is his gracious purpose to deliver us, he will deliver us against them all : he will stand in the midst between us and our destruction : he will bid us to continue in safety and in power, in wealth and in honour, as a people, and to glorify him for the wonders, that he hath wrought in our behalf.

To conclude—In times like the present may we especially remember, that we cannot answer the just demands of our country, unless we are mindful of our God. We owe to our country the sacrifice of every sinful inclination—we owe to it the cultivation of every Christian grace—we owe to it the employment of our talents and our industry in the study of his word—we owe to it the sincerity of our private devotions—we owe to it the public avowal of our faith. *Except we repent*, what is not in danger ? *Except we repent*, whither will not God's judgments extend ? *Except we repent*, what degradation, what misery will not befall us ? *Can thine heart endure*, saith the Lord, *in the days that I shall deal with thee* ^p ?

Let us then not harden our hearts from his fear, but, whilst the day of his long-suffering lasteth, let us fall down before him, with the lowest self-

^p Ezekiel xxii. 14.

abatement, to implore his forgiveness for ourselves and for our country, and to vow unto him all holy obedience. He hath, I trust, in his unspeakable mercy placed in our own hands the means of our preservation, and the means of our happiness. *If we put away from us every one the evil of his doings, and walk before him in newness of life*, we have, through the infinite merits of his Son, *the promise of this world, and of that which is to come*^a—we shall see all his blessings descend upon our country, whilst a more precious hope will be laid up in our hearts, and whilst we shall look to the crown of glory.

^a 1 Tim. iv. 8.

THE END.
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